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SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE WORLD SOCIAL SITUATION AND TO YOUTH, AGEING, DISABLED PERSONS AND THE FAMILY

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL
Second regular session of 1991
Item 12 of the provisional agenda**
COORDINATION QUESTIONS

Implementation of the programme for International Literacy Year

Report of the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the General Assembly, through the Economic and Social Council, the report of the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization entitled "Follow-up to International Literacy Year and the World Conference on Education for All", prepared in accordance with General Assembly resolution 44/127 of 15 December 1989 (see annex).

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Annex

Follow-up to International Literacy Year and the World Conference on Education for All

Summary

On 11 June 1991, the Executive Board of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) unanimously adopted a decision (see the appendix below), in which the Board, inter alia, authorized the Director-General of UNESCO to transmit the present report to the Secretary-General of the United Nations for submission to the General Assembly at its forty-sixth session, through the Economic and Social Council, as requested by the General Assembly in resolution 44/127. The report reviews International Literacy Year and the World Conference on Education for All, focusing on measures being taken to follow up these initiatives and sustain their momentum.

1. In launching International Literacy Year, 1990, at United Nations Headquarters on 6 December 1989, the Secretary-General declared:

> "Illiteracy is a major concern of the United Nations because, for nearly one thousand million women and men, the illiterate adults of the world, the right to education proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is not, as yet, a reality. Illiteracy is not only an obstacle to effective participation in society: in much of the developing world, where mass illiteracy is rife, it constitutes a threat to the progress of society itself with all that entails in suffering deprivation and missed opportunities".

During 1990, the world community responded to this concern by rededicating itself to education as a basic human right, an essential condition for democratic participation and a prerequisite for development. This commitment inspired the World Conference on Education for All: Meeting Basic Learning Needs held at Jomtien, Thailand in 1990, sponsored by UNESCO, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Bank. The Conference adopted a World Declaration on Education for All and a Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs. The sponsors of the Conference did not, however, content themselves with proclamations, they pledged themselves to sizeable increases in the support their organizations will provide to education in the coming decade. Thus, 1990 was a year of promise and hope for education.

2. Although the enthusiasm generated by International Literacy Year and the World Conference on Education for All was great, the enormity of the challenge was apparent to all and the measures needed to achieve success were not underestimated. According to the Director-General of UNESCO:

"Education for all needs the contribution to education from all .... If we combine vision with pragmatism, political will with economic resourcefulness, international solidarity with national commitment, the expertise of educators with the fresh contributions of the media, science and technology, the business community, voluntary organizations and many others - then, and probably only then, the struggle to bring education to all can be won".

It was also evident that International Literacy Year and the Conference were merely promising beginnings and, above all, summonses to action. The success or failure can only be judged in the light of what follows. Getting off to a good start, while essential, is far less challenging and demanding than keeping up a sustained pace over a decade that will not be free of difficulties or distractions. Achieving education for all is therefore certain to be an arduous test both of the political will of States and of the solidarity of the international community.

3. Both International Literacy Year and the World Conference were built upon partnerships: partnerships founded upon the realization that the state of education today will have a profound impact upon the condition of life on this planet tomorrow. Education is not a specialized area that can be entrusted to a single ministry or department and "fenced in" as its exclusive preserve. Education is the future. It is and must be the concern of all. The World Conference forged a unique and powerful alliance among the sponsoring organizations, participating Governments, non-governmental organizations, foundations and the private sector. In the 100 and more countries in which International Literacy Year came alive and had an impact, its success was based upon national and local partnerships, usually including several governmental agencies and a large number of voluntary bodies supported by the mass media. In many countries, the national commissions for UNESCO were instrumental in the mobilization of resources and the promotion of cooperation. Indeed, if International Literacy Year and the World Conference have one lesson to teach, it is unquestionably the power and promise of partnership.

4. For UNESCO, International Literacy Year and the World Conference are components of the Plan of Action for literacy approved by the General Conference at its twenty-fifth session in 1989 in resolution 1.5. 1/ The Plan identifies the struggle to create a literate world as the absolute priority of UNESCO and defines four main areas of effort: (i) alerting world public opinion, (ii) rallying the international community, (iii) strengthening regional literacy projects and programmes, and (iv) reinforcing technical cooperation with member States. In carrying out activities in the above areas, particular attention is to be accorded to the education of women and girls and to the plight of countries facing the most severe problems of illiteracy. International Literacy Year was aimed primarily at the first objective - awareness-raising - and the Conference mainly at the second - mobilizing the international community and the organizations and agencies that serve it. It is obvious, however, that the four objectives are closely interrelated and that progress in one area facilitates progress in others.

5. The follow-up to International Literacy Year and the World Conference has required a major restructuring of the Education Sector of the UNESCO secretariat and the establishment of a Basic Education Division, which is by far the largest unit within the Sector in terms of both staff and budget, charged with promotion and coordination of the whole range of basic education services which had previously been dispersed among several divisions. In conformity with the UNESCO Plan of Action for literacy, it is projected that the allocations to literacy and basic education will steadily increase throughout the decade, both in absolute terms and in relation to total programme expenditures.

6. UNESCO uses the terms "literacy" and "literacy work" in an extremely broad and comprehensive sense. "Literacy work" includes not only instruction of adolescents and adults in the skills of reading and writing offered in out-of-school settings to compensate for previous educational neglect, but also comprises efforts to universalize primary education, thereby preventing illiteracy in the future. It also takes in pre-literacy activities intended to inspire motivation for literacy, as well as a wide range of post-literacy measures necessary to give meaning and use to literacy skills, including training in vocational and life skills. UNESCO has favoured the term "literacy" because it stresses what is uniquely and distinctively human - the use of symbols - and cautions against the notion of a limited or second-class education emphasizing the practical and utilitarian while neglecting the symbolic, theoretical and ethical dimensions of learning. However, literacy is not a term with which all feel comfortable. It can suggest bookish, excessively formalized or even rote learning. It is also evident that a partnership must possess both shared ideas and a common and agreed terminology. "Basic education" was, thus, the term chosen by the sponsors of the World Conference. It includes both essential learning tools (such as literacy, oral expression, numeracy and problem solving) and the basic learning content (such as knowledge, skills, values and attitudes) required by human beings to be able to survive, to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions and to continue learning. The point that should be noted is that "literacy" and "basic education" are different terms, but usually refer to essentially the same activities.

I. INTERNATIONAL LITERACY YEAR

7. The United Nations General Assembly in resolution 42/104 of 7 December 1987, proclaimed 1990 as International Literacy Year. In that resolution, the Assembly noted with appreciation the programme for the Year submitted by the Director-General of UNESCO and invited that organization to assume the role of lead organization in planning and carrying out the Year. United Nations action was taken in response to resolution 2.2 adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO at its twenty-third session in 1985. In that resolution, the General Conference appealed to the General Assembly "to proclaim [a year] the celebration of which will contribute to greater understanding by world opinion of the various aspects of the problem of illiteracy and to intensified efforts to spread literacy and education". 2/ At its forty-fourth session in 1989 on the eve of International Literacy Year,

the General Assembly in resolution 44/127, reviewed arrangements for the Year, welcomed the convening of the World Conference on Education for All and appealed to Governments and organizations to lend support to literacy efforts. The Assembly also requested the Secretary-General to submit to it at its forty-sixth session a report on the implementation of the programme for International Literacy Year and decided to include in the provisional agenda of that session an item entitled "International Literacy Year".

8. The programme for International Literacy Year stressed the essential role that States, the United Nations, other intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations would have to play if the Year was to succeed in meeting its objectives. It was evident that an international year aimed at mobilizing public opinion and encouraging government action had to be a popular movement rather than a top-down effort administered by an international agency. The principal responsibility of the lead organization was not so much to provide direction and guidance as it was to offer encouragement and help. UNESCO perceived its purpose to be that of facilitating action by and communication among partners. Thus countless diverse efforts were gradually transformed into a coherent and powerful international movement. In the words of the Director-General:

> "We succeeded because we worked closely with others and made their success our purpose and goal. The Year has been devoted to building partnerships capable of action on the scale required in a world where more than one adult in four is illiterate and over 100 million children between the ages of six and eleven are without schools".

9. To provide a focus and coordinating point for UNESCO activities in support of the Year, the Director-General established an International Literacy Year secretariat and an Intersectoral Task Force for International Literacy Year, which he chaired. During 1990, the number of staff members of the secretariat - professional and secretarial - ranged from 12 to 15. They included four associate experts financed by their Governments (Japan, one; Norway, one; Sweden, two); two women professional interns from developing countries financed by Sweden and two consultants - one assigned by the International Reading Association and financed by the Government of the United States of America and the other provided under an agreement with the International Union of Students. In conformity with the guidelines for international years and anniversaries adopted by the General Assembly in its decision 35/424 of 5 December 1980, the International Literacy Year secretariat will be dissolved on 30 June 1991 and responsibility for follow-up to the Year will be assigned to permanent units within the Basic Education Division.

10. Before International Literacy Year began, its secretariat had identified a number of needs which required immediate action. Such action included the preparation of key documents providing essential information on literacy and the purposes of International Literacy Year design of a logo for the Year, publication of posters and production of a video for the launching of the Year. To the extent feasible, even these activities were handled in a participatory manner. For example, the logo for the Year was selected through

a worldwide contest organized by the International Association of Art and the official poster through a contest organized by UNESCO. Nearly all other activities of the secretariat were undertaken in cooperation with the different services and institutes of UNESCO, governmental agencies in many countries, the United Nations and other intergovernmental bodies, non-governmental organizations, institutions, foundations and the mass media. The International Task Force on Literacy, a coalition formed by some 30 non-governmental organizations to promote the Year was a particularly active initiator and partner in many undertakings; for example, a "pre-launch of ILY", an International Media Colloquium on Literacy and a "Book Voyage". The partnership approach was desirable because involvement implies interest and commitment. But it was also essential because the budget of the International Literacy Year secretariat was modest, approximately $500,000 (excluding staff costs) for the two-year period from 1 July 1989 to 30 June 1991, and the contributions of partners were urgently needed. The relatively low level of financing for the secretariat - an amount which does not include the cost of the World Conference, which was shared among the sponsors - was a deliberate decision. In their responses to a survey conducted in 1987, States members of UNESCO insisted that International Literacy Year must add to rather than diminish the resources available for literacy work. Hence, there could be no question of reducing UNESCO support to literacy efforts in member States in order to finance International Literacy Year. In fact, by far the largest financial support for activities for the Year - $1 million - was allocated directly by UNESCO to member States under the Participation Programme.

11. Voluntary contributions in cash, kind and services were important in enabling the International Literacy Year secretariat to expand its activities and are acknowledged with gratitude. In addition to the staff support mentioned above, the Government of Canada financed the printing of publications, the Government of Finland contributed $143,000 to the UNESCO Special Account for World Literacy for activities related to the Year, the Government of the Republic of Korea donated 100,000 lapel pins, Apple Corporation provided desk-top publishing equiment, the Canadian Organization for Development through Education (CODE) printed posters and pamphlets for the International Literacy Year secretariat and Zanders Feinpapiere AG donated paper for printing posters. Numerous other donations, which cannot be acknowledged here for reasons of space, were also received with appreciation. Equally appreciated were the numerous contributions made by enterprises, organizations and individuals to support literacy work, especially in developing countries. Certain of these were sizeable: the Japanese newspaper Yomiuri Shimbun, in addition to giving extensive coverage to literacy issues around the world (over 100 tabloid-sized pages), in cooperation with the National Federation of UNESCO Associations in Japan, raised more than $2.5 million in donations from readers to support literacy projects in Asian countries. Another important contribution to the success of the Year was made by the 94 Honorary ILY Ambassadors - 48 women and 46 men - who were nominated by their Government and appointed by the Director-General to give national leadership to activities for the Year.

12. The Direcgor-General of UNESCO will submit a report to the General Conference at its twenty-sixth session (Autumn, 1991) reviewing and assessing the year. This review, required by the guidelines for international years and anniversaries, will be based on responses to a questionnaire addressed to Governments of member States and on the extensive documentation that accumulated during the Year. By 21 March 1991, 59 responses to the questionnaire had been received: 9 from Asia and the Pacific, 17 from Africa, 5 from Arab States, 19 from Europe and North America and 9 from Latin America and the Caribbean. As 118 States members of UNESCO had established special committees for the year or had assigned responsibility for the Year to existing agencies, it is anticipated that 100 or more responses will eventually be received. The questionnaires were completed by officials or, in certain cases, committees designated by the Government of the State concerned. A summary of the responses to items concerning the degree to which the objectives of the Year were considered to have been achieved, the degree of success of the Year within the member State, the effectiveness of the support provided by UNESCO and the plans for follow-up is presented below. Where important additional sources of information on these items are available, they are cited.

Achievement of objectives

13. The programme for International Literacy Year established six objectives. Respondents were asked to rate the progress made in achieving these objectives by marking one of five responses: "Excellent", "Good", "Fair", "Poor", "Too soon to tell".

Objective no. 1 Increasing action by the Governments of member States afflicted by illiteracy or functional illiteracy to eliminate these problems, particularly through education in rural areas and urban slums, in favour of women and girls and among populations and groups having special educational problems or needs.

Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Too soon to tell
20 per cent	43 per cent	25 per cent	2 per cent	10 per cent

Objective no. 2 Increasing public awareness of the scope, nature and implications of illiteracy as well as of the means and conditions for combating it; in particular, an effort should be made to alert public opinion to the rate of illiteracy among adult women and its implications for the well-being of their children, the lower rate of school participation among girls than among boys and the association between illiteracy, on the one hand, and poverty, underdevelopment and economic, social and cultural exclusion on the other.

Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Too soon to tell
19 per cent	60 per cent	19 per cent	0 per cent	2 per cent

In order to obtain a second measure of the extent to which increased public awareness was achieved, the coverage of 130 major national and regional newspapers was reviewed for the years 1988, 1989 and 1990. In 1988, the average newspaper in the sample carried fewer than one substantial article on literacy (0.66). By 1989, as the build-up to the year began, this increased to 1.4 articles per paper. For 1990, the average was five articles per paper. Thus, the number of articles in the average newspaper sampled was 7.5 times greater in 1990 than in 1988. It might also be noted that the International Literacy Year secretariat, in cooperation with the UNESCO Office of Public Information, prepared a number of press kits for different occasions during the Year. Two of these - one for the launching of the Year in December 1989 and the other for International Literacy Day on 8 September - were distributed worldwide and reproduced in many newspapers.

The International Literacy Year secretariat distributed nearly 300,000 documents and responded to almost 3,000 requests for advice or assistance. This total does not include the large volume of publications on literacy issued by UNESCO regional offices and instituions. In all, nearly 100 titles - books, journals and documents - devoted in whole or in part to literacy were published by UNESCO and its various offices and associated institutions during 1990.

Objective no. 3 Increasing popular participation, within and among countries, in efforts to combat illiteracy, particularly through activities of governmental and non-governmental organizations, voluntary associations and community groups.

Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Too soon to tell
16 per cent	47 per cent	30 per cent	2 per cent	5 per cent

Objective no. 4 Increasing cooperation and solidarity among member States in the struggle against illiteracy.

Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Too soon to tell
18 per cent	37 per cent	26 per cent	10 per cent	9 per cent

Objective no. 5 Increasing cooperation within the United Nations system and, more generally, among all intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations in the struggle against illiteracy.

Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Too soon to tell
22 per cent	42 per cent	21 per cent	3 per cent	12 per cent

Objective no. 6 Using International Literacy Year for launching the Plan of Action for the Eradication of Illiteracy by the Year 2000 and for addressing issues of critical importance to the progress of literacy such as reducing primary-school drop-out and establishing post-literacy programmes to prevent relapse into illiteracy.

Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Too soon to tell
27 per cent	48 per cent	13 per cent	3 per cent	9 per cent

Success of International Literacy Year

How would you sum up the overall success of International Literacy Year in your country?

Very successful	Fairly successful	A failure
47 per cent	53 per cent	0 per cent

Support of UNESCO

(i) Were the documents, publications and materials produced or distributed by the International Literacy Year secretariat of UNESCO (newsflashes, The Challenge 1990, information notes, posters, ILY: Year of Opportunity, video launching the Year, International Literacy Year pins, special issue of the Courier, Literacy Lessons) received by the committee or structure responsible for International Literacy Year in your country?

Yes	No
91 per cent	9 per cent

(ii) Were these found to be generally relevant and useful?

Yes	No
95 per cent	5 per cent

(iii) Was the support for the Year provided by UNESCO through the International Literacy Year secretariat and regional offices satisfactory?

Yes	No
80 per cent	20 per cent

The responses to the last question are less enthusiastic but more revealing than those relating to other items. An analysis of the responses reveals that the negative judgements - with one exception - were formulated by developing countries, particularly those in Africa. The explanatory notes that accompanied them made it clear that what was needed and wanted was financial support for literacy projects. Most of these countries acknowledge the regular receipt of materials for the Year which they judge relevant and useful, and rate the Year as highly successful in raising awareness. But in a country where 50 per cent of the men and over 80 per cent of the women are illiterate, awareness is not the issue. What is necessary is action and, in the poorest

countries, action requires external support as well as national commitment. Many of the respondents rating the support of UNESCO effective include comments noting the prompt and helpful action taken to meet particular requests.

Follow-up to International Literacy Year

(i) Will an assessment of International Literacy Year be undertaken in your country?

Yes	No
67 per cent	33 per cent

(ii) Will the committee or structure responsible for International Literacy Year continue to function now the the Year is over?

Yes	No
72 per cent	28 per cent

(iii) If yes, will it continue to give priority attention to literacy and education?

Yes	No
88 per cent	12 per cent

14. How should International Literacy Year be followed-up? There cannot be only one follow-up plan for the Year, there must be hundreds: one for each country and organization and, in some countries, one for each state or community. It is also clear that the follow-up to the Year cannot be distinct from the follow-up to the World Conference on Education for All. These efforts may have had separate points of departure, but they share a common goal: education for all. Most member States that replied to the International Literacy Year questionnaire have clear ideas about the follow-up required and often definite proposals about how UNESCO can and should help. Just as the literacy situation differs from country to country, so do ideas regarding follow-up. In the industrialized countries, one of the results of International Literacy Year has been an increased awareness of functional illiteracy that affects a sizeable proportion of the population, often estimated at 10-20 per cent, and a strengthened commitment to relieve it through literacy training and to prevent its occurrence in future generations through educational reform. Another encouraging sign in these countries is their increasing willingness to support literacy efforts in developing countries. In the developing world, where mass illiteracy prevails, the obvious need and logical follow-up to the Year is to develop both the scale and effectiveness of adult literacy programmes, especially for women, and work to achieve universal primary education as soon as possible. In short, the responses of member States do not suggest a shortage of answers to the question: "What next?". UNESCO welcomes the opportunity to cooperate with member States in the follow-up to International Literacy Year.

15. International Literacy Year may be looked back on as the turning point in the struggle for a literate world. Until the present time, the two most common measures by which the progress of literacy is judged diverged from one another: the percentage of illiterates in the adult population constantly declined, from an estimated 38.5 per cent in 1970 to 26.6 per cent in 1990 and a projected 21.8 per cent in the year 2000, whereas the absolute number of illiterates, propelled by rapid population growth, steadily increased, growing from an estimated 890 million in 1970 to 950 million in 1985. The estimate for 1990, 948 million, however, reflects - and this for the first time - a diminution in the number of illiterates. A further decline to 935 million is projected for the year 2000. Encouraging as these statistics may be as proof that illiteracy can be vanquished, the progress they document is painfully slow. The pace of progress must be increased significantly if the ambitious goals of international action plans are to be achieved or even approached.

II. WORLD CONFERENCE ON EDUCATION FOR ALL

16. The World Conference on Education for All was an effort of unprecedented scope and vigour to rally the international community to the cause of education, to stimulate all countries to re-examine the basic learning needs of their populations and the measures required to meet them, and to forge an alliance among major national and international agencies able to provide technical, materials and financial support to education ministries and programmes in developing countries. The Conference was sponsored by UNESCO, UNDP, UNICEF and the World Bank, joined by nine co-sponsors (the Governments of Denmark, Finland, Japan, Norway and Sweden, the United Nations Population Fund, the United States Agency for International Development, the Asian Development Bank and the Islamic Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization) and eight associate sponsors (the Governments of Australia, Italy and Switzerland, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, the World Health Organization, the Canadian International Development Agency, the International Development Research Centre and the Bernard van Leer Foundation). The Inter-American Development Bank served as the Joint Organizer of Regional Activities in Latin America and the Caribbean. Hosted by the Government of Thailand, the World Conference on Education for All was attended by representatives of 155 countries, 33 intergovernmental bodies and 125 non-governmental organizations. The main goals of the Conference might be summed up as strengthening national commitment and increasing international solidarity in the promotion of basic education. In practical terms, national commitment is expressed by increased allocations to the education sector and, within the education sector, to basic education. But more of the same, the Declaration cautions, will not by itself suffice: what is needed is an "expanded vision" that surpasses present resource levels, institutional structures, curricula, delivery systems and management capabilities. International solidarity is, in effect, the counterpart of national commitment. The international community is committed to helping those countries that help themselves.

17. The World Declaration on Education for All, adopted by the Conference, consists of three parts: "The purpose", "The expanded vision", and "The requirements". The headings suggest its focus and content: "Meeting basic learning needs", "Shaping the vision", "Universalizing access and promoting equity", "Focusing on learning acquisition", "Broadening the means and the scope of basic education", "Enhancing the environment for learning", "Strengthening partnerships", "Developing a supporting policy context", "Mobilizing resources" and "Strengthening international solidarity". The Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs sets forth principles, policies and approaches for implementing the Declaration.

18. The Conference also endorsed a Statement on Follow-up to the World Conference on Education for All, in which it is stressed that the "principal follow-up will be at the country level". International follow-up action, it notes, should rely on existing mechanisms and serve national follow-up action and support it effectively. During the year that has elapsed since the Conference, each of the participating agencies has carried out follow-up activities appropriate to its particular field of action. For UNESCO, the emphasis at the national level has been on assisting member States to analyse needs, define strategies and prepare projects for extrabudgetary financing. To this end, UNESCO has worked with member States to organize "round tables" to design strategies for education for all in which national officials and experts have been joined by representatives of donor agencies. At the regional and global levels, follow-up activities have been designed to sustain the momentum and commitment generated in Jomtien, promote regional cooperation and exchange experience on key issues, such as means of ensuring better acquisition of learning in primary education and ways of providing education to women and girls in particular social, cultural and economic contexts. In carrying out these activities, particular attention is being given to meeting the educational needs of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. A special allocation of $2 million has been provided by the Director-General, through economy measures in other activities, to finance the immediate follow-up to Jomtien. The forty-second session of the International Conference on Education, held at Geneva in September 1990 and attended by ministers and senior educational officials from member States, selected literacy as its special theme. It provided the first opportunity since Jomtien for senior officials to examine the technical and professional requirements for successfully implementing strategies for education for all in a global forum.

19. The working relations among the four original sponsors of the World Conference - UNESCO, UNDP, UNICEF and the World Bank - have been maintained and strengthened through both bilateral and multilateral cooperation. Consultation meetings between the heads of the organizations have taken place on two occasions: at UNICEF in New York in July 1990 and at the World Bank in Washington in January 1991. Pursuant to the offer made at Jomtien, UNESCO has provided the services needed to prepare and monitor the implementation of decisions taken at those meetings.

20. The Statement on Follow-up adopted by the Conference anticipated that the diverse partners present at Jomtien would wish to be part of a consultative forum to promote the goals related to achieving education for all. The heads of the four original sponsors of the World Conference have agreed to convene

the first meeting of the International Consultative Forum on Education for All at UNESCO headquarters during the first week of December 1991. This forum will bring together participants from each major region, heads of intergovernmental and bilateral agencies and chief executive officers from foundations, the private sector, the media and non-governmental organizations invited in their personal capacities. The forum is intended to serve as an informal mechanism for consultation and information-sharing among the diverse constituencies present at the World Conference and committed to the success of its follow-up.

21. On the first anniversary of the Conference, the heads of UNESCO, UNDP, UNICEF, the World Bank and other sponsors issued a Statement of Solidarity to Achieve Education for All, in which they reaffirmed their conviction that basic education for all is not only a human right, it is also the cornerstone of human development. They also noted that goals for basic education were included in the Plan of Action which emanated from the World Summit for Children held in New York on 30 September 1990 - a plan endorsed by virtually all countries at the highest political level. In conclusion they said:

> "Ensuring that [the right to education] is met for the full breadth of the population is perhaps the single most effective means to ensure sustainable development. We therefore call upon all countries and upon the international community to join hands - to do all within their power and resources - to achieve the full letter and spirit of the goal of ensuring basic Education for All by the year 2000."

22. In short, the spirit of Jomtien lives on. The purposes set forth in the World Declaration on Education for All are being pursued at the national level with the active support of the international community. One of the most promising indicators of the success of the Conference is that both bilateral and multilateral agencies have announced a shift in their priorities in favour of basic education. UNESCO, the organization charged with responsibility for education within the United Nations system, has sought to facilitate and encourage the contributions of other agencies to basic education and, when required, to provide appropriate mechanisms for consultation and coordination. The unity of the Jomtien alliance, however, is founded upon a shared realization that the fate of humanity depends upon education and the recognition that education is the concern and responsibility of all. As the Secretary-General observed in launching International Literacy Year: "The United Nations is never more strong or more effective than when it acts collectively to resolve the urgent problems of humanity".

A time for action

23. The present report reviews the numerous measures being undertaken to follow up International Literacy Year and the World Conference on Education for All. Yet, in a larger sense, effective follow-up can only be achieved through worldwide educational expansion and reform. Although the problems differ in both nature and degree from one country to another, every society is challenged to meet the learning needs of its population. Nor do the similarities end there. All societies, for example, must make a concerted effort to identify their problems more accurately so that they may act more effectively to resolve them. Reference has already been made to the subtle

but serious problem of functional illiteracy, especially in the industrialized countries. But the application of measures based on a dichotomy between literate and illiterate has less and less validity even in the developing countries. The spread of schooling is producing large numbers of semi-literates for whom the traditional literacy class is inappropriate. The evolving nature of educational needs and realities requires careful study in all societies. It is also apparent that in every country there are individuals and groups who have many kinds of special requirements and needs, which must be taken into account if they are to succeed in efficiently mastering the necessary learning tasks. Moreover, the means for achieving educational improvement and reform have many similarities. While the potential of the new educational media and technologies is considerable, the success of educational efforts ultimately depends upon teachers - individuals serving in formal and non-formal settings who are trained and committed to helping others learn. Developed and developing societies alike must find ways of encouraging, respecting and honouring teachers, if educational reforms are to be realized. Yet, while acknowledging the essential role played by the teacher, one must not neglect the growing importance of self-learning and the means by which society can encourage and facilitate it. UNESCO has long supported the emergence of a rural press, especially in Africa, and the promotion of libraries and book production in all developing regions. Literacy has little meaning and will be little sought after in societies where newspapers and books remain rarities. In short, the challenge of providing education for all is immense and varied. International Literacy Year and the World Conference on Education for All have succeeded in placing literacy and basic education high on national and international agendas. The problem is no longer mainly one of raising awareness. The time for action is at hand: action on a global scale extending over a decade or more. That is the challenge ahead, a challenge which will demand both strengthened national commitment and enhanced international solidarity.

Notes

1/ See United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Records of the General Conference, Twenty-fifth Session, vol.1, Resolutions.

2/ See United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Records of the General Conference, Twenty-third Session, vol.1, Resolutions.

APPENDIX

Decision adopted by the Executive Board of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization on 11 June 1991

The Executive Board,

1. Recalling that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recognize the inherent right of everyone to education;

2. Emphasizing that International Literacy Year and the World Conference on Education for All are promising initiatives in the quest for a literate world, which must be vigorously followed up;

3. Welcoming the firm commitment of member States, their national commissions for UNESCO, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, the mass media and the private sector in support of International Literacy Year;

4. Acknowledging with gratitude the contributions in cash, kind, services and personnel made by governments, National Commissions for UNESCO, organizations and firms to the International Literacy Year Secretariat of UNESCO;

5. Appreciating the exemplary spirit of partnership and cooperation among the sponsors of the World Conference on Education for All and underlining the importance of follow-up activities that are necessary on the international and regional levels in order to realize the objectives set forth in the World Declaration on Education for All;

6. Recalling the Plan of Action approved by the General Conference at its twenty-fifth session in resolution 1.5, establishing the priorities and strategy of UNESCO in the struggle to achieve a literate world;

7. Referring to General Assembly resolution 44/127 requesting the Secretary-General of the United Nations to submit a report on the implementation of the programme for International Literacy Year to the General Assembly at its forty-sixth session through the Economic and Social Council;

8. Notes with satisfaction the report submitted to it by the Director-General entitled "Follow-up to International Literacy Year and the World Conference on Education for All";

9. Authorizes the Director-General to transmit the aforementioned report, as amended in the light of the discussion in the Programme and External Relations Commission, to the Secretary-General of the United Nations for submission by him to the General Assembly through the Economic and Social Council;

10. Urges member States and international organizations to intensify their efforts to achieve literacy and education for all within the shortest possible time-frame, focusing especially on girls and women;

11. Calls upon member States to demonstrate their active solidarity with countries facing particularly severe problems of illiteracy and lacking the resources to tackle the problem effectively without the support of the international community;

12. Also calls upon the international community and governmental and non-governmental organizations to help in providing extrabudgetary resources to combat illiteracy;

13. Issues an appeal to communications media to contribute further to sensitizing public opinion to the necessity of joint and collective efforts to overcome the problem of illiteracy.